



## Recommendations for Suicide Safer Schools in Texas School District Action Steps —from Texas Suicide Safer Schools Report, 2015 by Drs. Scott and Donna Poland with collaboration from Texas Department of State Health Services & Mental Health America of Texas

### Background and Policy

1. Ensure that your school district has a comprehensive suicide prevention policy included in the District Improvement Plan. This is required by Texas statutes that also specify training for all staff on best practices in suicide prevention. The plan should also provide training on suicide assessment for key school support personnel including counselors, social workers and school psychologists. Policies should be developed to ensure that suicidal students are properly supervised and that their parents are notified when their child is suicidal. Districts should be familiar

with local, community and state resources and interventions available in Texas including procedures for involuntary hospitalization.

2. Be familiar with Texas legislative initiatives for suicide prevention and the resources available at DSHS, TEA and MHAT/TexasSuicidePrevention.org. Review Texas Statutes related to suicide and share them with all campus principals. Available at: <http://www.texassuicideprevention.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Tx-Statutes-Regarding-Suicide-FINAL-7.15-copy.pdf>.
3. Recognize that lack of information, misinformation and commonly held myths about suicide has resulted in slower dissemination of best practice based information about youth suicide prevention.
4. Review the best practices list sent out by DSHS and TEA. Available at <http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/mhsa/sb831/> and [http://tea.texas.gov/Curriculum\\_and\\_Instructional\\_Programs/Subject\\_Areas/Health\\_and\\_Physical\\_Education/Health Education/](http://tea.texas.gov/Curriculum_and_Instructional_Programs/Subject_Areas/Health_and_Physical_Education/Health_Education/)
5. Be familiar with the Best Practices Registry provided by the SPRC at [www.sprc.org](http://www.sprc.org).
6. Develop district procedures and guidelines for prevention, intervention and postvention with at risk and suicidal students, parent notification, and referral and follow up services at school for suicidal students (Note: extensive guidelines, forms, letters and procedures available from [Preventing Suicide: A Toolkit for High Schools](#) from SPRC and [After a Suicide: Toolkit for Schools](#) from AFSP and SPRC).
7. Develop school policies for securing supervision and support for students who are identified as depressed and/or suicidal.
8. Become familiar with the research about sleep deprivation, early school start times and the adverse effect on secondary age students to develop policy regarding optimum start times.

### Infrastructure

9. Form a district task force on suicide prevention that includes representatives from elementary, middle and secondary schools and ensure that it meets twice a year at a minimum.
10. Ensure that your District School Health Advisory Councils (SHAC) includes advisors familiar with mental health and suicide prevention.

11. Identify local and state resources for suicide prevention and meet with their representatives in person or via conference call to improve collaboration (DSHS, local community or behavioral health centers and local suicide prevention coalitions).
12. Designate a suicide prevention liaison or liaisons and consider getting them credentialed in school suicide prevention from the American Association of Suicidology [www.suicidology.org](http://www.suicidology.org)
13. Ensure that school counselor schedules and ratio to students meets national recommendations from the American School Counselor Association (ASCA).

## Training and Tools

14. Obtain extensive, best practice based suicide assessment/prevention/intervention/postvention training for key personnel such as school counselors and school psychologists.
15. Investigate depression screening such as Signs of Suicide, (SOS), C-SSRS or others based on best practices.
16. Implement programs to safeguard and support LGBTQ students. Recognize that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth are often the target of bullying, and they have higher rates of suicide than their heterosexual peers. Increase support for these students. Resources are available from the Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network at [www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org) and the Trevor Project at <http://www.thetrevorproject.org>.
17. Review and implement training from the best practices list from DSHS and TEA for all school personnel. In Texas, the ASK About Suicide to Save a Life online videos or in person training is free as well as the online At Risk training for elementary, middle and high school public school personnel. Other trainings can be found on best practice list.
18. Conduct trainings for all staff on bullying prevention and recognize there is an association between bullying and suicide.
19. Implement programs to increase student resiliency. Increase efforts to ensure that every Texas student feels connected to their school, and provide activities where students are asked to list the significant adults in their life that they could go to for help.
20. Teach students the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline Hotline Numbers (**800-273-TALK or 800-273-8255**). Students should also know that on the iPhone, if suicide is mentioned to SIRI, you are provided with the National Crisis Hotline Numbers and SIRI offers to connect them.
21. Provide local, state and national crisis hotline numbers that can be accessed by parents and students on district websites.
22. Provide mental health presentations annually for parents that include suicide prevention information.
23. Provide information on the district website about depression and suicide. Include information about who parents should contact in an emergency and for ongoing help at the school if they are concerned about their child.
24. Review prevention and postvention procedures in this report and from: [Preventing Suicide: A Toolkit for High Schools](#) from SPRC and [After a Suicide: Toolkit for Schools](#) from AFSP and SPRC. Review postvention chapter in Texas' Coming Together to Care toolkit. [http://www.texassuicideprevention.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/2015\\_Toolkit\\_Online.pdf](http://www.texassuicideprevention.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/2015_Toolkit_Online.pdf).
25. Train staff to "Ask the Question" about suicide and not be afraid to inquire directly about thoughts of suicide. Research has shown that direct inquiry is exactly what is needed and is, in fact, likely to save a life. See ASK About Suicide to Save a Life videos (1 hr) at <http://www.TexasSuicidePrevention.org/training/video-training-lessons-guides/>.

**Complete Texas Suicide Safer Schools report.** <http://www.texassuicideprevention.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/2015-SuicideSaferSchools-FINAL-8.10.15.pdf>

**For more information about Suicide Safer Schools: Contact Mental Health America of Texas** <http://www.MHATexas.org> and Merily Keller at [hodgekeller@yahoo.com](mailto:hodgekeller@yahoo.com).